

Handout # 3 (Lesson # 2): Iraqi Refugees

I woke up one Sunday morning because my cell phone was ringing. The voice on the line had a Jordanian accent, and told me my period of waiting had ended. It was an employee from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) telling me my flight to the U.S. was scheduled in ten days. I was so sleepy when I answered the call, but was now wide awake. My feelings of happiness were so great that it woke my roommates. Even though I hadn't made a sound, they must have felt a sort of wordless spiritual connection. Although my roommates asked if something was wrong, I told them nothing. I didn't tell anyone about the call - not even my family - for at least a few days.

In spite of my happiness, I began to think about my last ten days in Iraq. I don't know why. Maybe because I found myself waiting yet again - just as I was still waiting for a safe morning to dawn in my country. My family sacrificed everything. We sold our house and furniture, spending all our money searching for a new home where we could be safe. We would often settle into a neighborhood, renting a house for only a few months before things became so dangerous that we were forced to move again.

These last days in Iraq were the worst of my life. We had no furniture and owned only the clothes on our backs. During the night, militias attacked our neighborhood, killing and stealing (we were constantly afraid that the militias would attack our neighborhood). Every family would designate one man to keep watch at night in case of attacks. During those days, I stayed awake through the night and slept only a few hours during the day. I was protecting my family. Each night I kept sentry between the gate, door and window. Our door had 5 locks, which I checked every hour. The last house my family lived in before I left was also dangerous. However, it had the advantage of being in the middle of the neighborhood, rather than the end. This position gave us time to prepare or escape if militia or terrorists attacked.

Despite any precautions, I was not reassured. We never felt safe. I found myself waiting for my flight to the U.S. in the same way I waited for the safety each new morning would bring, ending the darkness of night. I would fly to the U.S., to my new future, and rebuild what was destroyed in my life. I would reclaim my days and nights, sleeping and waking with the setting and rising of the sun. I would put my feet on solid ground after years in quicksand. I would have a car, a wife, and a house with a backyard and BBQ. I would go out at night and walk the streets without fear of killing, kidnapping, bombs, or the restraint of curfew.

Source: Iraqi Refugees in the Bay Area, *Stories in America*
[<http://storiesinamerica.blogspot.com>]